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Asia's First Globalizer

Globalization is often treated by politicians and journalists as something new. Although it is true that the end of the Cold War and the information revolution accelerated interdependence at multicontinental distances, the 1990s was not the first era of globalization. As early as 1848, Marx and Engels wrote that "in place of the old local and national seclusion and self-sufficiency, we have intercourse in every direction, universal interdependence of nations." Five years later, the arrival of Commodore Perry's black ships off the coast signaled the end of Japan's successful effort to isolate itself from an earlier wave of globalization carried by seventeenth-century European seafarers.

Globalization is also sometimes treated as if it were synonymous with Americanization. Demonstrators around the world have protested globalization by attacking McDonald's restaurants. But globalization is more a product of modernization than of Americanization. Advances in technology and communication were creating multicontinental interdependence long before there was a United States. Indeed, the United States itself was the product of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century globalization. At the same time, because it is the country with the largest market and has harnessed the information revolution to the greatest extent, many of the forces of modernization experienced in the rest of the world take on a U.S. appearance. In addition, the openness of U.S. society to immigration has produced a culture that absorbs influences from around the world. For instance, many Asians who purchase food at a Pizza Hut probably think of pizza as American rather than Italian.

Many fear the loss of indigenous culture to "homogenization." Here, Ja-

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pan has something to teach the world. It was the first Asian society to open itself to globalization in the nineteenth century, and to borrow successfully from the rest of the world. During the Meiji Restoration, Japan searched broadly for the tools and innovations that would allow it to become a major power rather than a victim of Western imperialism. It sent young people to the West for education. Its delegations scoured the world for ideas in science, technology, and industry. In the political realm, Meiji reformers were well aware of Anglo-American ideas and institutions but deliberately turned to German models because they were deemed more suitable to a country with an emperor.

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In some ways, by current values, Japan initially learned too much from the West. In an age of imperialism, Meiji Japan became an expansionist power at the expense of its neighbors, China and Korea. Its defeat of a European power in the 1904–1905 Russo-Japanese War was a reassertion of Asian power that was widely respected. But the path of military conquest that accelerated with the 1931 invasion of Manchuria ultimately led to World War II, defeat, and occupation. After that war, Japan again borrowed successfully from the rest of the world, this time to implement a strategy based on economic power. Again its success was remarkable, becoming the world's second-largest economy, widely admired for its technical and industrial prowess. But the lesson that Japan has to teach the rest of Asia (and the world) is not simply that an Asian country can compete successfully with the rest of the world in military and economic power. It is rather that, after a century and a half of globalization, it is possible to adapt while preserving a unique culture. Those who fear that globalization will lead to the homogenization of the world would do well to look carefully at Japan's cultural uniqueness after a century and a half of globalization.

Ambassador Hisashi Owada writes that Japan has gone through the opening of the country twice in the past, but "each time the process was incomplete as a societal revolution, to the extent that it was a quick fix to graft new ideologies and new institutions to the old sociocultural substructure of the traditional Japanese society." In other words, preserving cultural uniqueness may have come with a price. Now he sees a third opening of the country in the form of the new wave of globalization in political, economic, and social processes. In his words, the country is "truly going through a major societal transformation which will probably take a decade to complete."[1] Similarly, the Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the Twenty-

First Century believes that Japan can no longer rely on the "catch up and overtake model" that worked in the Meiji and postwar periods. They fear that "as things stand, Japan is heading for decline."[2]

Alternatively, Japan may be well placed to increase its power in the information age. Power is the ability to obtain the outcomes that a country wants in world affairs. Over the centuries, the resources that produced power have changed. In the eighteenth century, large population and infantry conferred power on France in Europe and China in Asia. With the nineteenth century, the industrial revolution transferred power to Britain and Germany in Europe and to Japan in Asia. In the twentieth century, nuclear science accentuated the power of the United States and the Soviet Union. But with the twenty-first century, information is most likely to be the key source of power. In the military realm, the number of tanks that Iraq used was less significant in the Persian Gulf War than the U.S. ability to apply the information revolution to military systems and to create smart weapons. In the economy, raw materials and territory matter less than openness and innovation in the use of information.

> Can Japan respond to globalization by developing its soft power?

Power can also be divided into hard and soft. Hard power is the ability to coax or coerce others to produce the outcomes you want by the use of economic carrots or military sticks. Soft power is the ability to get others to want the outcomes you want because of your cultural or ideological appeal. Soft power works by persuading others to follow or getting them to agree on values and institutions that produce favorable behavior. It depends heavily on the attractiveness and credibility of the free information that a country and its society transmits. In a world where massive flows of cheap information cross national borders every day, soft power has become relatively more important than in the past. Hard and soft power are related, but they are not the same. Soft power supplements, but does not replace, hard power.

The first era of Japan's response to globalization was based on hard power, particularly military power. After World War II, Japan learned that it could succeed better with economic power than with military power. As Richard Rosecrance pointed out in *The Rise of the Trading State*, Japan succeeded far better with its export economy than with its military-based Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. The question now is whether Japan can successfully respond to this new wave of globalization by developing its soft power. The prime minister's commission points to a number of obstacles. In the information age, individuals will possess more power than ever before, but

Japanese culture has not been based on individualism.

> The problem is that in Japan today a variety of regulations, barriers, and social conventions thwart talent. Many latent strengths remain untapped … One-way (top-down, or public-sector to private-sector) transmission of decisions and demonstration of power remain embedded through force of habit.[3]

Will Japan be able to cope with the changes that are necessary to adapt to globalization in an information age? The barriers are very real. Internet penetration lags behind the United States. Despite Japan's lead in mobile telephony, regulatory barriers remain. The government and public sector need change, and the education system needs to stress creativity and foster entrepreneurship. But awareness of the problem is the first step toward its solution. Generational change is occurring. The salary-man is no longer the image of the future for the young. New incentives are being created. Deregulation is gradually taking place. Already, some aspects of Japanese culture are having a transnational effect—witness the healthy effect of the Pokémon phenomenon on U.S. children. If Japan succeeds in adapting to this new round of globalization, its example may well confer it significant soft power in the information age. If history is any guide to the future, my bet would be that Japan will succeed once again.

Notes

1. Hisashi Owada, "The Shaping of World Public Order and the Role of Japan," *Japan Review of International Affairs* 14 (Spring 2000): 11
2. Prime Minister's Commission on Japan's Goals in the Twenty-First Century, "The Frontier Within" (Tokyo: Cabinet Secretariat, 2000), 1.
3. Ibid., 17.